Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5584th meeting

Tuesday, 12 December 2006, 10.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani	(Qatar)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	China	Mr. Wang Guangya
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. Voto-Bernales
	Russian Federation	Mr. Saltanov
	Slovakia	Ms. Štrofová
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Iddi
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the Middle East (S/2006/956)

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06-65360 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the Middle East (S/2006/956)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Israel in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Carmon (Israel) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 11 December 2006 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2006/960 and which reads as follows.

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the open thematic debate of the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East to be held on Tuesday, 12 December 2006."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the Council's provisional rules of procedure and previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2006/956, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the Middle East.

I invite the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, to take the floor.

The Secretary-General: Let me start, Mr. President, by thanking you for giving me the opportunity to present my report on the Middle East (S/2006/956). We are happy to see you here, Mr. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs.

As I told the General Assembly in September, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not just one regional conflict among many. No other conflict carries such a powerful symbolic and emotional charge, even for people far away. Yet, while the quest for peace has registered some important achievements over the years, a final settlement has defied the best efforts of several generations of world leaders. I, too, will leave office without an end to the prolonged agony.

The Middle East today faces grim prospects. The region is in profound crisis. The situation is more complex, more fragile and more dangerous than it has been for a very long time.

It was with this in mind that I took the initiative of preparing the report that is now in the Council's hands. My aim is to help us get out of the present morass and back to a viable peace process that will respond to the region's yearning for peace.

Mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians has reached new heights. The Gaza Strip has become a cauldron of deepening poverty and frustration, despite the withdrawal of Israeli troops and settlements last year. In the West Bank, too, the situation is dire. Settlement activity and construction of the barrier continue. Israeli obstacles impede Palestinian movement throughout the area. The Palestinian Authority, paralysed by a debilitating political and financial crisis, is no longer able to provide security or basic services.

Israelis, for their part, continue to live in fear of terrorism. They are dismayed by the inadequacy of Palestinian efforts to halt rocket attacks into southern

Israel. And they are alarmed by a Hamas-led Government which is, at best, ambivalent about the two-State solution and, at worst, refuses to renounce violence and rejects the basic tenets of the approach to the conflict consistently favoured by a majority of Palestinians and enshrined in the Oslo Accords.

In Lebanon, the country's political transformation is incomplete, and its leaders face a campaign of intimidation and destabilization. As last summer's fighting between Israel and Hizbollah showed, Lebanon remains a hostage to its own difficult history and captive of forces from within and from beyond its borders that wish to exploit its vulnerability.

Casting our glance to other parts of the region, we see the Syrian Golan Heights still under Israeli control and concerns about Syria's relations with militant groups beyond its borders. Iraq is mired in unrelenting violence. Iran's nuclear activities and possible ambitions have emerged as a source of deep concern to many in the region, and beyond it as well. All of this feeds, and is fed by, an alarming rise in extremism.

Each of these conflicts has its own dynamics and causes. Each will require its own specific solution and its own process to produce a solution that will endure. In each case, it is the parties involved who bear the primary responsibility for peace. No one can make peace for them; no peace can be imposed on them. No one should want peace more than they do.

At the same time, the international community cannot escape its own responsibility to use its influence. The various conflicts and crises in the region have become ever more intertwined. Though deeply separate and distinct, the various arenas affect and shape each other, making conflict resolution and crisis management more difficult. The international community must develop a new understanding of the uncertainty engulfing the Middle East and then shoulder its full responsibility in resolving it and stabilizing the region.

I would therefore like to offer a few thoughts on what the parties themselves and outsiders — from the Quartet to this Council and other United Nations bodies — might do differently in search for peace, in particular peace between Israelis and Palestinians, which, while no panacea, will go a long way toward defusing tensions throughout the region.

One of the most frustrating aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the apparent inability of many people on both sides to understand the position of the other and the unwillingness of some even to try. As a true friend and supporter of both sides, I would like to address frank messages to each.

It is completely right and understandable that Israel and its supporters should seek to ensure its security by persuading Palestinians, and Arabs and Muslims more broadly, to alter their attitude and behaviour toward Israel. But they are not likely to succeed unless they themselves grasp and acknowledge the fundamental Palestinian grievance, namely, that the establishment of the State of Israel involved the dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian families, turning them into refugees, and was followed 19 years later by a military occupation that brought hundreds of thousands more Palestinians under Israeli rule.

Israel is justifiably proud of its democracy and its efforts to build a society based on respect for the rule of law. But Israel's democracy can thrive only if the occupation over another people ends. Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon acknowledged as much. Israel has undergone a major cultural shift since the days of Oslo — all of Israel's major political parties now acknowledge that Israel needs to end the occupation, for its own sake and for the sake of its own security.

Yet thousands of Israelis still live in territories occupied in 1967, and over a thousand more are added every month. As Palestinians watch this activity, they also see a barrier being built through their land, in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. as well as more than 500 checkpoints to control their movement, and the heavy presence of the Israel Defense Forces. Their despair at the occupation only grows, as does their determination to resist it. As a result, some tend to invest much of their trust in those who pursue the armed struggle rather than a peace process that does not seem to yield the coveted goal of an independent State.

I agree with Israel and its supporters that there is a difference — moral as well as legal — between terrorists who deliberately target civilians, and regular soldiers who, in the course of military operations, unintentionally kill or wound civilians despite efforts to avoid such casualties. But the larger the number of civilian casualties during these operations, and the

more perfunctory the precautions taken to avoid such losses, the more this difference is diminished. The use of military force in densely populated civilian areas is a blunt instrument that only produces more death, destruction, recrimination and vengeance. And, as we have seen, it does little to achieve the desired goal of stopping terrorist attacks.

Israelis may reply that they are merely protecting themselves from terrorism, which they have every right to do. But that argument will carry less weight so long as the occupation in the West Bank becomes more burdensome and the settlement expansion continues. Israel would receive more understanding if its actions were clearly designed to help end an occupation, rather than to entrench it.

We should all work with Israel to move beyond the unhappy status quo and reach a negotiated end to the occupation based on the principle of land for peace.

It is completely right and understandable to support the Palestinian people, who have suffered so much. But Palestinians and their supporters will never be truly effective if they focus solely on Israel's transgressions, without conceding any justice or legitimacy to Israel's own concerns, and without being willing to admit that Israel's opponents have themselves committed appalling and inexcusable crimes. No resistance to occupation can justify terrorism. We should all be united in our unequivocal rejection of terror as a political instrument.

I also believe that the actions of some United Nations bodies may themselves be counterproductive. The Human Rights Council, for example, has already held three special sessions focused on the Arab-Israeli conflict. I hope that the Council will take care to handle the issue in an impartial way, and not allow it to monopolize attention at the expense of other situations where there are no less grave violations, or even worse ones.

In the same vein, those who complain that the Security Council is guilty of a double standard — applying sanctions to Arab and Muslim Governments, but not to Israel — should take care that they themselves do not apply double standards in the other direction, by holding Israel to a standard of behaviour that they are unwilling to apply to other States, to Israel's adversaries or, indeed, to themselves.

Some may feel satisfaction at repeatedly passing General Assembly resolutions or holding conferences that condemn Israel's behaviour. But one should also ask whether such steps bring any tangible relief or benefit to the Palestinians. There have been decades of resolutions. There has been a proliferation of special committees, sessions and Secretariat divisions and units. Has any of that had an effect on Israel's policies, other than to strengthen the belief in Israel and among many of its supporters that this great Organization is too one-sided to be allowed a significant role in the Middle East peace process?

Even worse, some of the rhetoric used in connection with the issue implies a refusal to concede the very legitimacy of Israel's existence, let alone the validity of its security concerns. We must never forget that Jews have very good historical reasons for taking seriously any threat to Israel's existence. What was done to Jews and others by the Nazis remains an undeniable tragedy, unique in human history. Today, Israelis are often confronted with words and actions that seem to confirm their fear that the goal of their adversaries is to extinguish their existence as a State and as a people.

Therefore, those who want to be heard on Palestine should not deny or minimize that history or the connection that many Jews feel with their historic homeland. Rather, they should acknowledge Israel's security concerns and make clear that their criticism is rooted not in hatred or intolerance, but in a desire for justice, self-determination and peaceful coexistence.

Perhaps the greatest irony in this sad story is that there is no serious question about the broad outline of a final settlement. The parties themselves, at various times and through various diplomatic channels, have come close to bridging almost all of the gaps between them. There is every reason for the parties to try again, with principled, concerted help from the international community. We need a new and urgent push for peace.

The road will be long, and much trust will have to be rebuilt along the way. But let us remember where this effort needs to take us: two States, Israel and Palestine, within secure, recognized and negotiated boundaries based on those of 4 June 1967; a broader peace encompassing Israel's other neighbours, namely, Lebanon and Syria; normal diplomatic and economic relations; arrangements that would allow both Israel and Palestine to establish their internationally

recognized capitals in Jerusalem and would ensure access for people of all faiths to their holy places; a solution that respects the rights of Palestinian refugees and is consistent with the two-State solution and with the character of the States in the region.

Reaching that destination is not as impossible as some might imagine. Most Israelis genuinely believe in peace with the Palestinians — perhaps not quite as the Palestinians envision it, but genuine nevertheless. Most Palestinians do not seek the destruction of Israel, only the end of occupation and their own State — perhaps in a slightly larger territory than Israelis would wish to concede, but a limited territory nevertheless.

Our challenge is to convince the people on each side that these majorities exist on the other side, while showing that spoilers and rejectionists are a distinct minority.

I believe that the fundamental aspirations of both peoples can be reconciled. I believe in the right of Israel to exist, and to exist in full and permanent security — free from terrorism, free from attack, free from even the threat of attack. I believe in the right of the Palestinians to exercise their self-determination. They have been miserably abused and exploited, by Israel, by the Arab world, sometimes by their own leaders and perhaps even, at times, by the international community. They deserve to see fulfilled their simple ambition to live in freedom and dignity.

The Road Map, endorsed by the Council in its resolution 1515 (2003), is still the reference point around which any effort to re-energize a political effort should be concentrated. Its sponsor, the Quartet, retains its validity because of its singular combination of legitimacy, political strength and financial and economic clout. But the Quartet needs to do more to restore faith not only in its own seriousness and effectiveness, but also in the Road Map's practicability, and to create the conditions for resuming a viable peace process. It needs to find a way to institutionalize its consultations with the relevant regional partners. It needs to engage the parties directly in its deliberations. The time has come for the Quartet to be clearer at the outset on the parameters of an endgame deal. And it will have to be open to new ideas and initiatives.

Tensions in the region are near the breaking point, I need not tell you, Mr. President. Extremism and populism are leaving less political space for moderates, including those States that have reached peace agreements with Israel. Welcome moves towards democracy, such as elections, have simultaneously posed a quandary in bringing to power parties, individuals and movements that oppose the basis of current peacemaking approaches. The opportunity for negotiating a two-State solution will last for only so long. Should we fail to seize it, the people who most directly bear the brunt of this calamity will be consigned to new depths of suffering and grief. Other conflicts and problems will become that much harder to resolve, and extremists the world over will enjoy a boost to their recruiting efforts.

The period ahead could well prove crucial. Every day brings defeats in the struggle for peace and reasons to give up. But we must not succumb to frustration. The principles on which peace must be based are known to all of us. Even the contours of what a solution would look like on the ground are well mapped out. I believe that we can break the current stalemate and make new strides towards peace.

The United Nations and the Middle East are closely intertwined. The region has shaped this Organization like no other. The situation, the people and the thirst for peace are all very close to my heart. I know that they are close to yours as well. As a matter of urgency, let us match that concern with concerted action.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Secretary-General for his clear and straightforward statement.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign of the State of Qatar.

I should like to begin by thanking all present for having accepted our invitation to participate in this open debate to discuss the question of peace in the Middle East. That issue is at the top of the Organization's list of priorities in the field of international peace and security. I would be remiss if I failed to welcome the Secretary-General and to thank him for his tireless efforts devoted to this cause, which he considers to be one of his most important priorities.

The United Nations has been seized of the dilemma of the Middle East conflict since the establishment of the Organization. Its engagement in this crisis, in all its aspects, has been manifested in efforts that have been effective at times and have stagnated at others, depending on the intensity of the

situation at any given moment and on the degree of concern and attention shown by the international community. It is no secret that the crisis has had grave consequences for the region and for the world. Its repercussions will continue to be felt as long as it eludes a peaceful, just and comprehensive solution that guarantees the rights and spells out the obligations of all the concerned parties.

When, following the Madrid Conference, the international community decided to assume responsibility for the establishment of a just, permanent and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, the people of the region felt that this augured well for their future. A sense of optimism prevailed, because a long-sought-after objective was finally within reach. Fifteen years after the Madrid Conference, optimism has dissipated, hopes for peace have been shattered and frustration and despair prevail. Destruction is rampant. Many innocent Arabs and Israelis continue to fall victim to acts of violence and counter-violence. Added to this list are acts of terror whose effects are felt far beyond the region — acts that constitute a serious challenge to the international community. All of this is the result of our failure to arrive at a just and comprehensive peace.

As the Council embarks on a discussion of this fundamental issue of international peace and security, we must not forget a number of basic points. The conflict has lasted for over half a century. Failure to arrive at acceptable solutions to this question over the years has led to catastrophic consequences for the overall situation in the region. The repercussions have been felt throughout the international community. While the reasons for failure are well known, just and equitable solutions need not remain elusive. All it takes is good intentions and commitment to the tenets of international legitimacy.

Israel is not the only side that is legitimately entitled to live in peace and security in the region. Palestinians and Arabs have exactly the same right. Generally speaking, the Arab side has for some time been consistently confirming, through both its positions and its actions, that it earnestly desires and seeks a just and comprehensive peace.

We must understand that the basic political, security and development problems of the region cannot be resolved without an honourable and peaceful resolution of the question under discussion. History has shown that a military solution to the problem is impossible. It also shows that the civilized humanitarian course of action that we are collectively advocating dictates that we renounce extremism and avoid rigid positions and unilateral solutions that seek to guarantee the rights of one side and stamp out those of the others.

We have more international resolutions, projects, plans and positions than we can possibly use. We must acknowledge that fact. What we lack is the political will to achieve the common objectives that will serve the interest of all parties to live in peace, security and stability and promote coexistence and constructive cooperation.

At this stage, the Arab-Israeli conflict can no longer be resolved through partial solutions. Not only have these been shown to be futile, but they have also failed to bring about a permanent settlement. We need to pursue a coordinated, integrated and consistent approach to resolve the conflict, build peace and achieve reconciliation. The approach must be comprehensive and open to participation by all parties, must reflect the needs and interests of the parties concerned and must protect fundamental rights and humanitarian principles. It should stamp out violence and attend to the social and psychological aspects of the conflict, with a view to arriving at sustainable peace and stability. We are all called upon to confront parties on both sides that refuse to work towards peace.

I would like to recall that Israel has repeatedly stated that it needs a partner in the peace process. But who will determine the criteria for an acceptable partner?

The efforts that the State of Qatar is making to bring about sustainable peace in the Middle East are not simply an item under discussion in the Security Council. They constitute a part of the policy that we are pursuing with a view to arriving at a peaceful, comprehensive and just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The longer the conflict continues, the worse the consequences will be for our peace and stability. We are part of the region; we both influence and are influenced by developments in it.

The United Nations is responsible for the achievement of sustainable peace in the Middle East, as the first purpose of the Organization is to maintain international peace and security. Maintaining international peace and security, undertaking effective

collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to international peace and security and upholding the principles of justice and international law are among the primary objectives of the Organization.

While the Security Council is the organ that has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, it is incumbent upon all Member States to seek to resolve international disputes peacefully, in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

It is regrettable that the Council deals with issues of lesser gravity and importance with unwavering seriousness and resolve, but fails to accord the dangerous question of the Middle East, which poses an ominous threat to the region as a whole, the same degree of significance. We are all aware of the critical and alarming circumstances in the region. The Council should therefore accord greater attention to this question in order to revive the peace process. It must play an active role with a view to arriving at a comprehensive, just and permanent solution to the Palestinian question and the Arab-Israeli conflict. When the Council is seized of other ongoing conflicts around the world, that is the course it pursues.

We strongly believe that the dividends of peace will not only benefit the parties concerned and the immediate region but will also extend to the world at large, particularly to influential actors, to whom we appeal today to earnestly strive for peace.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council. I give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to thank the Secretary-General for his presence here with us, for his report and for the briefing he has just given us. His extensive report includes a number of ideas and proposals, which, if taken into account, will represent an effective means of ending the present stalemate in the Middle East political process and resolving the Israeli-Palestinian problem.

On behalf of the Palestinian people, its leadership and of our President, I wish to pay tribute to the Secretary-General and to thank him most warmly for all of his efforts aimed at arriving at a just and lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East, in particular his support for the Palestinian cause. The Secretary-General has always been a great friend to Palestine and to peace in the Middle East. We wish him much happiness and success in his new life, after 31 December.

Allow me at the outset, Sir, to extend to you our warm congratulations on your country's accession to the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We are fully confident that under your presidency, thanks to your skills and your wisdom, the work of the Council will be carried out successfully. I wish also to pay tribute to the Ambassador of Peru, who showed great wisdom in conducting the work of the Council last month.

I should like also to express our warmest thanks to the delegation of Qatar for its excellent initiative to convene this important ministerial-level meeting on the question of sustainable peace in the Middle East. This meeting is an extension of the ministerial meeting of the Security Council held on 21 September 2006 on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. We have great faith in the Council's role of promoting international relations, safeguarding peace and security and promoting international law.

The components of peace in the Middle East are quite clear and precise and are reflected in the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Arab Summit at Beirut in 2002, the Road Map set out by the Quartet and endorsed by this body, and the principle of land for peace. Yet the main problem remains the lack of political will on the part of the international community and the absence of any serious and tangible measures and actions, which are essential for the effective implementation of those resolutions and initiatives through practical and specific mechanisms.

Given the longstanding paralysis of the peace process, the Arab Foreign Ministers met in the Security Council last September in an attempt to break the impasse and to revitalize the peace process. In the wake of the war in Gaza and in Lebanon last summer, and following the deterioration of the situation in more than one area of the Middle East, which further endangered international peace and security, we insisted that action be taken in tandem with the Arab response, in particular by Europe. We therefore welcome the European efforts aimed at breaking the

impasse and relaunching the peace process through practical and specific mechanisms.

We would also underscore the promising nature of the Baker-Hamilton report. The report contains recommendations that can be used as a prelude to resuming the political and peace processes. We would also stress the importance of statements made by the Israeli authorities expressing their readiness seriously to consider the Arab Peace Initiative as an appropriate platform for negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis on the one hand and, on the other, other Arab parties whose territory has been occupied by Israel since 1967.

We have repeatedly stated that the absence of a solution to the question of Palestine and the continuing occupation of Arab territories by Israel are explosive factors that have continued to fuel the conflict and have led the way to violence of all kinds, terrorism, regional confrontation and international crises.

The Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization met last Saturday, 9 December 2006, under the presidency of Mr. Mahmoud Abbas. It welcomed all international efforts and initiatives aimed at resuming the peace process, in particular as concerns the Palestinian-Israeli track, which will be the cornerstone of any solution to the other crises in the region. The Executive Committee believes that there are very promising opportunities on the horizon that must be seized in order that the peace process may be resumed and practical and specific mechanisms set up to resolve the situation.

More than one party has proposed that an international conference be held to resolve the Israeli-Arab question in all its aspects. That would be a sound and appropriate decision and should be given greater thought so as to ensure the success of such a conference. There is no doubt that, under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, that initiative, which was also welcomed by Israel, will lead to a resumption of serious negotiations if appropriate mechanisms are found in response to that call for calm.

We underscore the importance of the proposal to send an international monitoring force to the region to consolidate the general calm and the ceasefire so that a general and mutual ceasefire can be observed. That international force could be placed between the Israeli and Palestinian parties.

At its last meeting, the PLO Executive Committee reaffirmed that the PLO is the sole address and legal representative of the Palestinian people. It is the sole forum responsible for negotiations. In fact, negotiations will always be undertaken by the PLO. Any national Palestinian crisis or issues that arise in the occupied Palestinian territories are an internal matter, and thus the PLO, under the leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas, has always been, and will remain, ready and capable of undertaking negotiations on the final status, without any preconditions, at the earliest time possible.

With regard to our Israeli counterparts, Israel should abstain from using pretexts and false excuses for not meeting deadlines on negotiations and achieving peace. Israel should acknowledge the difficulties that have arisen and that have undermined any serious peace talks in the past. Israel, the occupying Power, has continued to carry out its unbridled campaigns of illegal colonial settlement, including in East Jerusalem. It has continued to confiscate Palestinian land and to build the illegal, racist separation wall. It is also continuing a policy of extrajudicial killing, and arbitrary arrests and has destroyed Palestinian infrastructure and property. In addition to other collective punishment measures that it has taken, Israel has detained more than 10,000 Palestinians in its prisons. Israel has closed roads and crossing points; it has set up hundreds of barricades and checkpoints. All this has dismembered Palestinian territory and isolated East Jerusalem from the rest of Palestine.

Israel must honour its commitments in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, by respecting the applicability of this Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The imperative for peace in the Middle East requires the occupying Power, Israel, to renounce its tactical manoeuvres by which it claims that is desires peace while at the same time it carries out practices that shake the very foundation of the peace process and destroy opportunities for peace.

We reaffirm that there are a number of opportunities for achieving peace in the Middle East through serious negotiation and through the adoption of mechanisms to create a positive climate for resumption of negotiations so that the objective we are

all seeking can be achieved — namely, the restoration of peace.

The Security Council, as the body responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, therefore, must shoulder its tasks, take the necessary measures to set up an appropriate environment and assist the parties to reach a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli problem, at the very heart of which is the Palestinian question. These measures include the complete withdrawal of Israel from all Arab territory occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, in order to guarantee the establishment of two States, Israel, which already exists, and a Palestine to be established on the Palestinian territory that was occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem. A just and negotiated solution must be found to the question of Palestinian refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

I repeat here that the proposals made by President Abbas during the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, 29 November 2006 — namely, that a Palestinian State will be a peaceful State, living in security and peace, in good neighbourliness with its neighbours, including Israel — will be a fundamental pillar for regional and international security. If that objective can be achieved, the Middle East region will enjoy peace, security, coexistence and prosperity. Is this not the ultimate objective that we all are seeking — one that we have been seeking for a number of years?

Mr. Carmon (Israel): I wish to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for addressing us this morning, and by taking this opportunity to make mention of his 10 years of service, specifically as it pertains to our region. It is, of course, impossible in the allotted time to fully reflect on the Secretary-General's legacy. Nonetheless, I want to thank him for his many years of dedication to this Organization and to the nations of the world.

Allow me to commend the Secretary-General on his remarks this morning, where he comprehensively addressed the conflicts in our region in an unbiased, balanced manner, turning to both sides constructively — which, I must add, is not a traditional narrative we hear at the United Nations and its various organs, as the Secretary-General himself has stated. We offer him our deepest appreciation.

The analysis of events in the Middle East offered by Member States and heard in statements delivered in this world body tends to be misleading. Symptoms are routinely mistaken for causes, and decisions are made based on rhetoric rather than reality. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is erroneously identified by some as the source of all instability in our region. And yet, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is actually the consequence — not the cause — of extremism and radicalism, of incitement and intolerance, of hate and terrorism, all poisoning our region.

Our region — our world — is challenged by warring ideologies. It is no surprise then that the road to peace runs directly through the battlefield, between moderates and extremists. Unless the international community is willing to stand up and confront the enemies of peace, progress will never be made, no matter how much we yearn for peace, no matter what we are willing to sacrifice for it.

The extremist-moderate divide can be heard in the different voices in our region. Let us listen to what the Hamas Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said while visiting Iran a few days ago:

> "We will never recognize the Zionist Government and will continue our jihad-like movement until the liberation of Jerusalem. We have a strategic depth here in the Islamic Republic of Iran and throughout the Islamic Arab world."

Let us listen to what the First Vice-President of Iran, Parviz Davoudi, told Prime Minister Haniyeh during the same visit: "The Iranian Government and nation will continue their all-out support for the Palestinian Government led by Hamas."

Now let us listen to the other voices in our region, telling Palestinians and Israelis to return to the negotiating table in order to guarantee security and stability for the people of the region.

The vast difference between those voices is precisely the reason why we must insist on the international community's three conditions for Hamas to recognize Israel, renounce violence and abide by previous agreements. Without meeting the three conditions, the Palestinian Authority will continue to support violence and terror, not peace and prosperity. The vast difference between those voices is also the reason why the international community must insist on

the full implementation of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). Without fully ensuring the end of Hizbollah's State within a State, the region will remain in danger of extremist influence.

The vast difference between those voices is the same reason why the international community cannot tolerate a nuclear Iran. It is with particular indignation that, as we sit here in this Council, on the other side of the world — on our side of the world — in Iran, in a country whose President has threatened to wipe another Member State off the map, we hear of a conference under way with its own "experts and scholars", concluding that the Holocaust never happened. As offensive as this is to the State of Israel and to the Jewish people, it must be equally as appalling to the States Members of this world body, whose founding principle and noble mission were the world's answer to the horrors and extremism of the Second World War and the tragedy of the Holocaust, as reflected in the very first clauses of the United Nations Charter.

Iran's denial of the Holocaust, its pursuit of nuclear weaponry, and its strategic backing of Hamas and Hizbollah — and who knows what next? — threaten peace and security. Iran cannot and will not rewrite history. It cannot deny the Holocaust, yet it remains the duty of the international community to make sure that those extremists do not write the world's future and the future of our children.

The international community must, then, do more than convene repeat debates and initiatives. It must make it abundantly clear throughout the region that supporting coexistence is what is needed, while supporting terror has its price. Being soft on the extremists and placating them in exchange for insincere commitments will not buy us their patience or even their compliance. It will merely guarantee their triumph.

The formula for peace has already been prescribed. It is found in the road map and in various forums of the international community, some of which the United Nations itself is part of. At its very heart is the principle of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. That vision has been consistently reaffirmed over the years, particularly in the past few months, by Israel's leadership.

Sadly, however, the vision remains unmatched on the Palestinian side. Israel embarked on the painful course of disengagement from the Gaza Strip last year to show the Palestinians its commitment to peace. In return for disengagement, we received terror. Over the past year, more than 1,000 Qassam rockets and mortar shells have been fired by Palestinian terrorists at southern Israeli communities and towns. Weapons have also been and are still continuously smuggled into Gaza. Corporal Gilad Shalit was kidnapped by Palestinian terrorists and is still being deprived of his freedom. Those are not overtures of peace and moderation. These are the overtures of terror and extremism.

The ceasefire two weeks ago was once again a sign of our willingness to try our hand at peace. Israel wishes to maintain the ceasefire as a means to end the violence and enable progress in political negotiations. For that reason, Israel is exercising restraint and maintaining the ceasefire despite repeated violations by Palestinian terrorists.

Our commitment to peace is also the reason why resolution 1701 (2006) must be fully implemented in southern Lebanon. The full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) remains a test for this Council. It can bring stability to the region, but in order for that to happen, our kidnapped soldiers Udi Goldwasser and Eldad Regev must be released immediately and unconditionally. An active and efficient United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon is also needed, as is the full deployment of the Lebanese army over all its territory. The arms embargo must be enforced and the border with Syria must be monitored for trafficking. Secretary-General Annan has made it a personal campaign to support the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), and we trust that the incoming Secretary-General will continue such efforts.

We understand that engaging in our region does not come without frustrations, but the solution is not to bypass essential steps in order to create the illusion of progress. It is not to find forums that allow abuse of the automatic vote. It is not to construct a one-sided narrative in which only side, Israel, has obligations, while the other side, the Palestinians, have only inalienable rights. Those venues, sometimes hosted by the United Nations, simply show that they are good only for highlighting differences, not for resolving them.

If we have not yet turned the vision of peace into reality, it is not for lack of meetings in this Council or

the Assembly. It is not for lack of agreements or resolutions or international conferences. It is simply for the lack of an appropriate partner on the other side to confront the seeds of extremism and embrace moderation. In answer to your question, Mr. President, a partner is one who will at least abide by the very basic fundamental conditions set forth by the international community itself. Direct negotiations with partners willing to make concessions, as Israel has already demonstrated in the historic peace made with two of its neighbours, is the only way forward. As the Secretary-General said in his statement this morning,

> "it is the parties involved who bear the primary responsibility for peace. No one can make peace for them, impose peace on them, or want peace more than they do".

I hope that the moderates in our region understand what needs to be done in order for peace to be realized, and where the real threat to our region lies. There have been far too many victims in this conflict — victims from both sides, neither of which has a monopoly on that status or on human suffering. Israelis, Lebanese and Palestinians all deserve better. They deserve to see real efforts in our region.

Recent developments in the past month show what will happen if we refuse to engage moderates and allow extremists to cast their dark shadows of influence. We must join hands in fighting extremism and radicalism, incitement and intolerance, terrorism and hate. Only then will the parties find themselves on the road to peace — a road wide enough for all citizens of the Middle East — resulting in the revitalization and fulfilment of real peace in our region.

Mr. Iddi (United Republic of Tanzania): I want to join other speakers in thanking you, Mr. President, for organizing this important debate on the situation in the Middle East. Events in the Middle East continue to remind us of the complexity of the task of bringing about a lasting and just settlement to the age-old conflict that has brought great suffering and destruction to the region. I also want to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2006/956) and his insightful statement to the Council.

The United Republic of Tanzania has, over the years, remained gravely concerned about the endless violence in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in the loss of many lives, including those of women and children, and the destruction of critical infrastructure. We have continuously reminded Israel that, while it has a right to protect its citizens, it needs to exercise maximum restraint, especially when reacting to individual acts of violence directed at its territory. In the same vein, we have called upon the Palestinian Authority to halt all acts of violence directed against Israel, including the firing of rockets, which in their totality undermine compliance with peace agreements.

We are keenly conscious that the Security Council has for many years supported the search for peace in the Middle East. That is demonstrated in its numerous resolutions, as well as its support for the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and other agreements that have been reached by the parties involved in the conflict. In addition, the Council has continuously supported the efforts of the Quartet in the implementation of the Road Map, seeking a two-State solution — a Palestinian and an Israeli State — living side by side in peace and security.

Regrettably, despite all those efforts, a lasting solution to the Palestinian question remains elusive. There has been more talk than there has been action. That state of affairs must be reversed, and agreements must be translated into serious and concrete action. It is up to the Palestinians and the Israelis to realize that no peace agreement will be viable unless both of them accept, and act in line with, common aspirations for a two-State solution. They must both comply with their obligations to the Road Map and the requirements of the Quartet. For its part, the international community must assist in every way possible, so that the peace accords are implemented.

With that in mind we are following with keen interest renewed signals hinting at a revival of the peace process. We therefore urge Palestinians to forge a Government of national unity and to work with Israel towards peace and security for all in the region. We therefore welcome the agreement between Prime Minister Olmert and President Mahmoud Abbas to establish a ceasefire in Gaza, and we hope that it will hold and contribute to an atmosphere supportive of the peace process.

We welcome the proposal for an international peace conference on the Middle East. We see it as an opportunity to generate positive political commitment to resolve the Palestinian question in the search for

durable peace in the region. We also view the current climate as conducive to the launching of a serious peace process leading to a comprehensive solution to the conflict. It must not be wasted.

The United Republic of Tanzania expresses its appreciation for the regional efforts of Arab States in the search for peace and stability in the Middle East, including helping to avert the humanitarian crisis confronting the Palestinian people. The current ceasefire should provide a real opportunity to bring about a lasting settlement that guarantees security and prosperity for the region and to avert further humanitarian tragedies. The situation calls for renewed emphasis on supporting the parties and ensuring that the people of Palestine can control their own destiny in peace and hope, and that the people of Israel obtain a real chance to live in security and in full partnership with their neighbours.

Turning to the situation in Lebanon, recent events, including the killing of a leading politician, Cabinet resignations and anti-Government rallies, have contributed to increased tensions. The deterioration of the security situation is placing the country's democratic system in danger, thereby threatening its independence. We call for maximum self-restraint and for the kind of wisdom required to bring about a unified, peaceful Lebanon. The people of Lebanon deserve nothing less.

Mr. Saltanov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): This is not the first time in recent months that the Security Council is meeting to discuss the question of the Middle East. That illustrates the mounting concern in the international community about the deteriorating situation in the region, which is having a very negative effect on international stability and security. That is why the initiative by the State of Qatar to hold today's Council meeting is both timely and important.

We must note that the situation throughout the Middle East region is dangerously unbalanced — a trend that is unfortunately growing. Several hotspots of tension have arisen in the region, which are to a great extent interlinked and mutually influencing. That is the Middle East, and we must take that reality into account. The lack of resolution to one conflict situation there creates others, as well as overall regional instability. The search to a solution to the problem of the Middle East therefore requires an integrated approach. It also requires collective multilateral efforts that include the participation of directly interested parties, States in the region, as well as the international community. Unilateral steps, and the use of force in particular, can only serve to further to aggravate the conflict.

It is particularly urgent to lend fresh impetus to a negotiated settlement to what is both the oldest and newest conflict in political history, namely, the Arab-Israeli conflict. That is of course one of the main problems of the Middle East. We have the reference points for a search for mutually acceptable outcomes. They are contained in the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the Madrid terms of reference and the Quartet Road Map. The Arab Peace Initiative also has the positive potential to provide for the full normalization of relations between the Arab countries and Israel. Recently, efforts have been made in the area that is central to a settlement in the Middle East, namely, Palestine and Israel, including the assistance of key regional parties and the international mediators of the Quartet, towards restoring the political process. An important step taken in that area, namely, the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, must, in our view, be made comprehensive and be extended to the West Bank. We must try to achieve a complete cessation of violence, terrorist acts and incitement to terrorism, wherever those may originate. It is equally important to support the willingness to enter into direct dialogue that was expressed by both the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Olmert, and the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Abbas.

Nevertheless, there has been no breakthrough so far. In order to eliminate the obstacles to dialogue, we must remove the remaining sensitive issues for both parties. Those include the release of the Israeli soldier and a solution to the fate of the Palestinians detained in Israel. There is also another element that is slowing down the Palestinian-Israeli summit — that is the fact that a coalition Palestinian Government has not yet been formed — a Government that is capable of reflecting in its programme and activities the well-known criteria set out by the Quartet.

The situation in the Palestinian territories, especially in the Gaza Strip, in particular the socio-economic and humanitarian situation, remains extremely difficult. The continuing blockade, severe restrictions on movement of people and goods and the closing of the crossing points affect, above all,

ordinary people and create a mood of pessimism and hopelessness among the Palestinian people. That state of affairs can no longer be tolerated and the situation must be resolved.

In resolving those important issues, we must not lose sight of the strategic goal — the achievement of a just settlement to the Palestinian problem on the basis of the principle of creating a sovereign, democratic, territorially contiguous Palestinian State, existing side by side with Israel in peace and security. The main instrument for achieving that is the Road Map, which was approved in the unanimous adoption of Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) and which has received international legal status.

It is extremely important that the document be accepted by both parties — the Israelis and the Palestinians. It may, of course, be implemented through mutually linked agreed steps by both parties. That is the approach that prevails in the Quartet. The Road Map is a generally recognized and effective instrument for international assistance in the situation in the Middle East, and it will serve as the basis for our future work.

The events of the past year, the crisis in Lebanon and Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip have confirmed the argument that peace in the Middle East, by definition, can only be comprehensive and must cover all negotiation tracks — Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian. Russia is in favour of a speedy resumption of collective efforts towards peace through negotiations, including halting the occupation begun in 1967 and ensuring normal conditions of security and development for all the States of the region, including Israel. It must be recognized that the deadlock in one of the areas of negotiation is holding back progress in other areas. For that reason, steps aimed at reviving the Syrian and Lebanese parts of the peace settlement are so important.

In the view of my delegation, the time has come to take a fresh look at the proposal to convene an international conference on the Middle East. We spoke in favour of that idea last year. It is gaining growing recognition in the world and in the region and is in accordance with the Road Map, in which an international conference was prescribed as an important element of progress. However, such a major event, whose task we see as relaunching the peace process in the Middle East, must be well organized and must receive the approval of all of the interested parties.

In conclusion, allow me, on behalf of the Russian Federation to express our great appreciation for the substantial contribution made by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, in consolidating the efforts of the international community to solve the problems in the Middle East.

Ms. Štrofová (Slovakia): At the outset, I would like to join previous speakers in thanking Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his opening statement and for presenting his comprehensive report on the Middle East, containing valuable observations and thoughts. Thank you also, Mr. President, for organizing and chairing today's thematic debate to discuss the recent developments in the Middle East.

During the previous meeting on a ministerial level in September, we witnessed a very useful and constructive exchange of ideas on recent developments in the Middle East. Slovakia feels strongly encouraged by the prevailing opinion in the United Nations Security Council on the need to revive the peace process in the region and on the necessity to move forward in promoting a comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict in general, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular.

Peace that is capable of promoting and delivering stability, security and prosperity to the entire Middle East is today more than ever a vital need. As the tragic developments on the ground — notably in Gaza last month — have once again proved to all of us — there is no military solution to the many challenges and problems of the region, with the Israeli-Palestinian dispute at the core. We remain convinced that such a settlement could and should be achieved only through peaceful negotiations and full implementation of all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and the principles defined by the Quartet in the Road Map.

In that regard, we welcome the agreement of last week between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to establish a mutual ceasefire in Gaza. That is a crucial confidence-building measure and a vital step and prerequisite towards a much-needed sustained period of calm that could encompass the entire region. We therefore hope and expect that both parties will exercise their utmost restraint and do everything

possible not to jeopardize further possible progress and promising prospects for peace.

In that connection, we express our deep concern about any statements or efforts aimed at questioning or denying the Holocaust, as well as the right of Israel to exist. Such acts of clear incitement to hatred only contribute to further destabilization of the entire Middle East region and undermine the ongoing peace efforts.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm Slovakia's support for a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and negotiations between the two sides. We are convinced that the Quartet still represents the most appropriate mechanism for advancing the peace process. The updated Road Map reflects recent developments on the ground and is the most efficient plan for achieving a lasting peace settlement to the conflict. We welcome the ongoing efforts of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to form a Government of National Unity. We hope and expect that such a Government will be committed to Quartet principles and that its political platform will enable an early engagement as well as the continuation of dialogue towards a solution to the Middle East conflict.

We also hope and reiterate our call for an immediate end to violence by Palestinian factions and attacks on Israel, notably the launching of rockets against Israeli population centres, and for the release of the abducted Israeli soldier.

We remain deeply concerned over the economic and humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza. In this regard, we welcome the continuation and expansion of the Temporary International Mechanism, which enables the channelling of resources and delivery of assistance directly to the Palestinian people, thereby addressing their urgent humanitarian and financial needs. To this end, we urge Israel to resume transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues. We also call for full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access and for all border crossings be reopened and remain open.

At the same time, we expect the Israeli Government to continue its commitment to peace in the Middle East, based on principles laid out in the Road Map, and to refrain from steps and activities that may contradict the principles of international law. In this context, we repeat our call for the immediate release of Palestinian Ministers and legislators in Israeli custody and for the freeze of all settlement activities.

Turning to Lebanon, Slovakia is very concerned about the current developments in the country. We confirm our strong support of the Lebanese Government legitimately elected last year in free and democratic parliamentary elections. We welcome and support all efforts and steps undertaken by the Lebanese authorities to regain control and authority over the whole of its territory and to re-establish stability and security within the country.

Lebanon needs stability. Only then can it be reconstructed and further developed. We believe that stability, reconstruction and development are in the interest of all Lebanese parties, including Hizbollah, which should act responsibly. The national dialogue has to continue. We are convinced that all disputes have to be resolved at the negotiation table and not on the streets, where there is always a risk of provocation and escalation of the conflict. That is dangerous.

Lebanon is currently going through a very difficult time. We must work towards the diminution of tensions and not their increase. All relevant actors in the country and the whole of the region have to act with utmost responsibility, keeping in mind the consequences of a possible escalation of the situation. We are convinced that an escalation would not serve anybody.

Lebanon and its people have already suffered enough. The international community should not allow further destabilization of the country and of the whole region. Lebanon's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity have to be respected by everybody, including all actors inside and outside the country, Lebanon's neighbours, and countries such as Iran.

The national dialogue must continue with the aim of reaching consensus on several important issues, including disarmament of all militia in the country, which, through their offensive acts, represent a constant threat to the stability and security of Lebanon and its neighbours.

The Lebanese Government has to become the sole authority and must maintain a monopoly on the use of force within its territory. In this respect, we would also like to emphasize the importance of ensuring full compliance with the arms embargo

imposed in resolution 1701 (2006) and of making progress towards the normalization of relations between Lebanon and Syria, as well as the delineation of their common borders, including in the area of the Sheba'a Farms. We are convinced that the resolution of these issues would significantly contribute to the stabilization of the situation in the region.

Last, but not least, we should also not forget the need for the two abducted Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hizbollah on 12 July 2006 to be released. We also understand the need to resolve the issue of the Lebanese prisoners and we encourage the respective authorities to make progress on that issue.

We fully understand that the situation in Lebanon and the broader region is complicated and that it takes time to make progress on certain issues. However, we wish to underline that progress can only be achieved through peaceful means and negotiations. As has already been proven on several occasions, there is no military or violent solution to any conflict or dispute. Reconstruction of the country and further development can proceed only under peaceful circumstances. A stable and prosperous Lebanon would significantly contribute to the stabilization of the situation in the whole of the Middle East region.

In conclusion, I reiterate our belief that there is still a window of opportunity to reinvigorate the peace process in the Middle East. That window of opportunity should be seized by all concerned, and especially the relevant parties, through concrete and immediate action. We hope for and encourage continuous engagements among all the parties to this long and protracted conflict.

Mr. Wolff (United States): There can be no denying that today's thematic debate focuses on a goal that we all share, namely, sustainable peace in the Middle East. The aspirations of the people of the region for a more secure and prosperous future have been left unfulfilled for too long. In this regard, the United States remains firmly committed to the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, as well as to the Road Map and the principles contained therein, as the Road Map is the only agreed international basis upon which to move forward towards that goal.

As President Bush noted unequivocally before the General Assembly,

> "I am committed to two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. I am committed to a Palestinian State that has territorial integrity and will live peacefully with the Jewish State of Israel. This is a vision set forth in the Road Map, and helping the parties reach this goal is one of the great objectives of my presidency." (A/61/PV.10, pp. 10-11)

To help make this goal a reality, President Bush has repeatedly stressed that the United States would pursue diplomatic efforts to engage moderate regional leaders, help the Palestinians strengthen and reform their security sector, and support the parties in their efforts to come together to resolve their differences.

In part, to this end, the United States is the single largest donor to the Palestinian people, having provided $468 million in direct assistance in 2006. But while we work closely with our Quartet partners and our friends in the region to create an environment that will facilitate progress towards the realization of this two-State vision, we must make certain that our parallel efforts here at the United Nations bolster, and do not inadvertently undermine, the pursuit of a lasting peace in the region.

In this regard, the United States is disappointed that in recent weeks the Security Council and the General Assembly have indulged in debate over an excessive number of politicized and biased resolutions that do not contribute constructively, in our view, to that effort, nor have they enabled any progress towards the two-State solution in accordance with the Road Map. Calls for high-level debate and a greater role for the Security Council in encouraging peace efforts cannot sidestep the fundamental fact that the ultimate responsibility for progress towards peace rests with the parties and with their fulfilment of the parallel obligations they have agreed to undertake in accordance with the Road Map.

Therefore, the role of the international community, including this body, must be to help create an environment that will enable the parties to come together to resolve their differences. We must ask ourselves whether that goal will be achieved through the sort of polarized, hortatory debate that has characterized recent Security Council and General Assembly discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the region itself, President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert have reached agreement on an important ceasefire in Gaza, and Prime Minister Olmert has delivered an address making clear his interest in working towards peace with the Palestinians. President Abbas has deployed security forces to northern Gaza to try to enforce that fragile ceasefire, and Israel has demonstrated remarkable restraint in not responding to recent rocket attacks into Israel.

In order to build on that progress, the United States is actively involved in efforts to reform the Palestinian security sector. We are engaged in that important effort because we recognize that, ultimately, the only way that real progress is going to be made is if Palestinian security forces are able to bring stability to Gaza and prevent attacks against Israel.

With Israel, the United States has pressed for concrete progress related to Palestinian access and movement within and between the West Bank and Gaza. We are pleased at the success of the European Union Border Assistance Mission at the Rafah checkpoint in Gaza, and we are working to build on that success. While we recognize that important progress in this area remains to be made, the United States remains committed to working actively on this issue with both parties in order to make real, concrete progress and to improve the lives of millions of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza.

Implementation of the Road Map necessitates partnership. The United States has worked with the international community to support the efforts of President Abbas to establish a Palestinian Government that accepts the Quartet principles of renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. We commend President Abbas for his efforts to break the current impasse caused by a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority that fails to govern responsibly.

We deeply regret that Hamas has walked away from a proposal for a technocratic Government that would have allowed for early engagement. We were also dismayed at the statement made by Palestinian Authority Government Prime Minister Haniya on 8 December in Tehran that the Palestinians would never recognize Israel. That position demonstrates that the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority Government is not interested in becoming a partner for peace and continues to fail in its duty to the Palestinian people to govern responsibly.

Having mentioned Tehran, I wish to state that the United States strongly condemns the recent Iranian-sponsored conference on the Holocaust, which called into question the magnitude of the horrors of the Holocaust, and rejects in the strongest possible terms any and all efforts that seek to refute the historical fact of the Holocaust.

When one considers the many aspects of this issue, it is clear that any discussion of fostering greater peace in the region must include Lebanon. The conflict launched by Hizbollah in July caused enormous suffering and destruction in both Lebanon and Israel, highlighting the risks of acquiescing to a status quo in Lebanon that permits militias to remain armed and unchecked.

The United States supports the efforts of the democratically elected Government of Lebanon as it expands its sovereignty over all its territory. We continue to call for the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006), particularly the provisions regarding the disbanding and disarming of the militias. We call once again for the immediate, safe and unconditional release of the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser, kidnapped on 12 July.

The current demonstrations in Lebanon are an attempt by Hizbollah and its allies, with support from Syria and Iran, to overthrow Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's democratically elected pro-reform, pro-sovereignty Government, in a clear bid to re-establish Syrian influence over Lebanon. The recent assassination of Lebanese Minister of Industry Pierre Gemayel is especially shocking in that light and underscores the threat to the physical safety of Lebanon's remaining Cabinet members.

The people of the Middle East deserve a realistic approach to fostering peace and security. For decades, the United States has remained committed to working directly with the parties. We call upon others to join us in pursuing viable diplomatic strategies rooted in a clear understanding of the underlying sources of this conflict. Only that approach will serve the interests of peace and advance our collective aspirations for a more secure, stable and democratic Middle East. Thank you, Mr. President, for your own efforts to that end.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I would urge members with lengthy statements to kindly deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

Mr. Mayoral (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Many thanks, Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani, for convening this open Council debate. Argentina recognizes the deep commitment of the State of Qatar to the Middle East peace process and wishes to thank you for the efforts that you personally have made this year in that regard.

My delegation thanks and congratulates the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for introducing his report on the developments in the situation in the Middle East during his 10-year term of office. We believe that the analysis provided by Mr. Annan is particularly valuable and should receive careful consideration by the Security Council and the international community in general with an eye to the future.

Argentina agrees with the Secretary-General's analysis and with his main observations and recommendations. In its capacity as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, Argentina has on various occasions closely followed the developments described by Mr. Annan, particularly during what we could call the height of the post-Oslo era, the beginning of the second intifada and the current difficult juncture. Based on our own experience during those years, our conclusions are similar to those presented to us by the Secretary-General. Thus, we have repeatedly expressed them throughout our current Council term, which ends this month.

Despite the dismal panorama presented by the Middle East peace process — on which all speakers have agreed — today we are more than ever convinced that we must not allow the legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the region to sink into oblivion. We know that the primary responsibility for the current, regrettable state of affairs lies with the parties that have long been directly involved in this conflict. Nevertheless, we cannot fail to point out that the international community in general, and the Security Council in particular, share part of that responsibility. This body's inability to respond to — and put an end to — the deepening crisis in the Middle East has been particularly obvious, especially over the past two years and, I would say, the past year.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at the heart of the Middle East peace process, and that is the aspect to which we must attach the highest priority. In recent years, the Quartet, through the Road Map, has been entrusted with the task of leading the process, defining what the outcome of the peace process should be and the path that the parties should follow in order to bring it about. In spite of the efforts undertaken since 2002, the goal of two States living side by side in peace and security has continued to be as elusive and as difficult to achieve as ever, and progress has stalled in the first stages.

That failure does not mean that the Quartet and the Road Map are mechanisms that have lost their usefulness or that they should be abandoned. However, it is clear that, if the Quartet does not engage more actively in monitoring the implementation of a revised Road Map and does not play a more proactive role in the peace process, it will become of little relevance. We therefore call upon the members of the Quartet, the main regional players and the Security Council to reflect deeply on this matter and to reactivate their role before it is too late.

As we have said before, the parties directly involved are primarily responsible for the stalemate in the peace process. In recent years, neither Israel nor the Palestinian Authority has fulfilled its obligations, and the exchange of mutual accusations has not contributed to the fostering of a climate of trust and cooperation.

We need hardly recall that some Israeli practices, including the expansion of settlements, the construction of the separation barrier in the West Bank, extrajudicial executions, the excessive use of force, the arbitrary arrest of Palestinian officials and legislators and the stifling of the economy of the Gaza Strip do not contribute to fostering among the Palestinian population a sense of confidence and optimism about the future. Worse, they fuel extremism and encourage the rejection of compromise. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has further exacerbated the already dire living situation faced by the Palestinian people.

On the other hand, the inability or unwillingness of the Palestinians to maintain peace and order in Gaza, to prevent further rocket attacks against Israel, to release the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, to reform its institutions, to eradicate corruption — a failure that has very significant political consequences — and to combat violent extremism do not help to generate

confidence in Israel regarding the need to negotiate with a Palestinian counterpart — a counterpart with which it will, eventually, have to negotiate. Regrettably, the current attitude of the Hamas Government not to comply with international requirements further complicates the situation.

In spite of that disheartening picture, we believe that there are some positive events that have the potential to change the dynamic. One is the Gaza ceasefire, which we believe should be extended to the West Bank and accompanied by a number of additional measures, such as the deployment of international observers on the basis of agreement with both parties. Talks should also be resumed between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas on the possible establishment of a mechanism for the protection of civilians that is acceptable to both parties.

In this context, we also support the proposal to convene an international conference with a similar format to that used at the 1991 Madrid Conference, with a view to relaunching the peace process on all of its tracks.

Although we have focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we also attach a great deal of importance to the quest for a resolution on the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian tracks. With regard to the situation between Israel and Lebanon, we reaffirm our commitment to the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and other Council resolutions. With respect to the situation between Israel and Syria, a fundamental element of the search for comprehensive peace is the end of the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights and the return of that territory to Syria, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm once again Argentina's profound commitment to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East that benefits all the peoples of the region, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry (United Kingdom): We would like to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar for having honoured us with his presence this morning.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and to express British appreciation to him for all of his efforts, including his work to establish the Quartet. I think that this may well the Secretary-General's last public speaking opportunity in this forum, so I would like to pay tribute to him for what he has done over so many years working with the Council.

We very much agree that the key issue remains ending the frustration and instability that prevail in the Middle East through a comprehensive and just solution. Colleagues have already sketched out the elements of a prescription for such a solution. Progress in Israel and Palestine is of the utmost importance for the achievement of peace and stability in the region. It is essential that we make progress towards a comprehensive peace and a two-State solution and recognize, at the same time, that we need a regional approach which encompasses all the relevant issues.

For the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Blair and his Government remain fully engaged and committed to that purpose. The United Kingdom welcomes the ceasefire in Gaza, which came into effect on 27 November. We hope that it will be a first step towards further progress. We maintain that the Road Map is the best way to achieve a two-State solution. Both Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas have reiterated their commitment to it as the way forward. We continue to call upon both sides to implement their commitment in full. We hope that a meeting between the Prime Minister and the President can take place at the earliest opportunity and that it will lead to real progress.

The United Kingdom continues to call for the release of the captured Israeli soldier, Corporal Shalit, and for Palestinian legislative Council members detained in Israel to be accorded their full legal rights and to be either charged or released.

We will continue to support the Palestinian people through the Temporary International Mechanism. So far, the European Union has contributed a total of more than €186 million to that Mechanism. That includes payment to key workers in the public sector, such as health care workers, teachers, the poorest Palestinian Authority employees and some of the most vulnerable Palestinians. Those allowances have helped to keep basic services running, put money into the economy and provided a livelihood for the poorest Palestinian families.

We welcome President Abbas's efforts over the past few months to form a national unity Government. We still need a Palestinian Government that we can work with. The United Kingdom supports the Quartet's call for a Palestinian Government to be formed with a platform based on the Quartet's three principles: renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map. Until then, we will continue to provide support to the Palestinian people directly.

The United Kingdom and the European Union as a whole underline the importance of preserving and strengthening the capacity of Palestinian institutions. The European Union has expressed its readiness to provide enhanced support to a Palestinian Government with which the EU can engage.

Recent events have further highlighted the need for us to move forward and return to a political process. We express our grave concern at the incident that took place in Beit Hanun on 8 November, which led to the tragic death of Palestinian civilians. We have continued to call on Israel to do everything it can to avoid civilian casualties.

The firing of Qassam rockets from Gaza into Israel must stop. Recent clashes between Hamas and Fatah have led to the deaths of innocent children. All sides in Israel and the occupied territories must intensify efforts to bring all violence to an end. Civilians on both sides have the right to live in peace and security.

We continue to call on Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including the natural growth of existing settlements, and to dismantle all outposts built since 2001, in line with the provisions of the Road Map. It is essential that the Palestinian Authority make every effort to prevent terrorism, as required under the Road Map. We welcome President Abbas's recent efforts to improve the security situation in Gaza.

We must now all build on this fragile progress to try to create the political, security and economic conditions for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East reflecting all relevant Security Council resolutions, including, most recently, resolution 1701 (2006).

Mr. Ikouebe (Congo) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset, Mr. President, to welcome your well-advised and very timely initiative to convene this ministerial-level meeting. We welcome also the fact that this debate is taking place under the presidency of Qatar — your country — which is playing a stabilizing role in the region. I should like also to thank the Secretariat for the relevant information and analyses which it has made available to us, and the Secretary-General for his outstanding presentation this morning.

In my delegation's view, we cannot have yet another debate in this forum that leads only to fruitless discussions. On the contrary, given the critical situation we are facing, in which any acceptance of the status quo or paralysis would be intolerable and unacceptable, it appears that the time is ripe for the Council to give fresh impetus to the peace process, which, tragically, has been at a standstill for several months.

The strong message that the Council, in its capacity as the primary body entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security, must send today to the international community as a whole, and primarily to the main protagonists in the conflict, is that of our clearly expressed will that there be an immediate and unconditional resumption of negotiations leading to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Specifically, the Council must unambiguously and firmly support the idea of convening promptly an international conference aimed at putting back on track the measures advocated within the framework of the agreed comprehensive settlement. Such an initiative must involve careful preparations.

In that context, we reaffirm the key role of the Quartet in the resumption of the process. We reaffirm also the validity of all painstakingly negotiated international documents and instruments, such as the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Oslo accords, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the Quartet Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. In this context, the principle of land for peace remains fundamental.

In order for those goals to be attained, such an initiative must break new ground by ensuring that all regional actors are deeply involved. We must recognize the interaction and interconnection among the various crises in the Middle East: the conflict in Palestine, the crisis in Iraq and the crisis in Lebanon.

There is a need, therefore, for a comprehensive approach involving contributions on the part of all neighbouring States in the quest for lasting solutions. We urge the involvement of all regional actors that could help to ease tensions, and we believe that the positive role played by the League of Arab States should be taken into account. The outcome of the meeting held last weekend is testimony of the firm will of the Arab States to find a political solution.

Today it is clear to all that there can be no military solution to this 60-year-old conflict, whose ramifications threaten to engulf an already destabilized region. We thus call for the convening, in the coming months, of an international conference aimed at revitalizing prospects for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution leading to the coexistence of two States — Israel and Palestine — in accordance with the vision set out in the Quartet Road Map, which was endorsed by the Security Council.

We expect the main protagonists henceforth to display the greatest restraint by refraining from violence and from any unilateral acts that could compromise preparations for the proposed international conference, for it is ultimately up to the parties to make the final decision.

Mr. President, it is on the basis of that conviction that my delegation supports the contents of the draft presidential statement prepared by your delegation.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to begin by thanking the Deputy Prime Minister of Qatar for having convened this meeting on an issue that is crucial to international peace and security, that is, lasting peace in the Middle East. I thank the Secretary-General for his report and for his statement, to which we listened very carefully. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the tireless efforts he has deployed over the past 10 years in the service of peace in the Middle East.

France welcomes the recently concluded ceasefire between Palestinians and Israelis in the Gaza Strip. The respective commitments of President Mahmoud Abbas and of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert are positive and encouraging signs, following several months of violence which took the lives of hundreds of civilians. We call on the parties strictly to abide by their commitments and encourage them promptly to extend the ceasefire to the West Bank.

That positive decision must be followed by other confidence-building measures. France thus calls for the unconditional and immediate release of Corporal Shalit and of the Palestinian elected officials and political figures imprisoned in Israel.

The implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh arrangements and the full respect of the Agreement on Movement and Access would be two other measures that could restore confidence and promote in particular the recovery of the Palestinian economy. Israel's remittance of the tax revenue due to the Palestinian Authority from the beginning of the year would also be likely to help bring rapid relief to the disastrous humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories.

Cessation of violence, in order to be effective and lasting, must be accompanied by a real political plan. Both parties have responsibilities in this respect. The Palestinians must not deviate from the path marked out for more than 15 years in the context of the peace process. France has constantly supported the efforts of President Abbas for national unity, and from this viewpoint the recent inter-Palestinian clashes are very disturbing.

France calls on all of the parties to exercise restraint and to act responsibly. We invite all of the Palestinian factions, and Hamas in particular, to cooperate with the Palestinian President in the formation of a new Government whose political platform would reflect the Quartet's principles. Such a Government would be a legitimate partner of the international community, from which it would receive the necessary support for the implementation of economic, political and security reforms.

Israel, for its part, has a duty to refrain from any unilateral action that would undermine the prospects for creating a politically, economically and geographically viable Palestinian State. It must, in accordance with the opinion of the International Court of Justice, put an end to settlement activities and to the construction of the wall within the West Bank.

France will continue to work with determination for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution, based on the Security Council resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the land-for-peace principle and on the Arab Peace Initiative.

With the fragile hope that was created by the ceasefire, we remain convinced that an international

conference, carefully prepared in coordination with all of the parties, should be organized in the near future. The Quartet seems to us to be the appropriate forum for discussing and establishing the conditions for the success of such a conference. France recalls its wish that a meeting of the Quartet at the level of principals be held swiftly to this end.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): Mr. President, let me begin by thanking you for convening this important debate. Let me also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing and report.

The complexity of these issues requires that we sometimes take a step back and look at the picture from a distance. The Secretary-General's report and briefing did just that. I will reflect on some of the proposals in the report, while others require more thorough consideration. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for keeping the international community focused on the goal of bringing lasting peace to the Middle East throughout his tenure.

Two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within internationally recognized borders — that is the goal. There is nothing new in that, but, as the Secretary-General also indicates, the longer it takes to reach that goal, the harder it is to reassure people that there is reason to hope, that there is a better future ahead. Therefore, it is essential that the parties, the regional players and the international community rededicate themselves to the goal.

The key to success, however, rests with the parties. The international community can help, working with the parties to lay the groundwork for a solution. The Quartet plays a pivotal role in this effort. But success can come only when the parties are committed and ready.

To this end, there are, again, encouraging recent developments. First, there is a ceasefire in Gaza. It may be only a first step, but reaching that agreement was not easy. We encourage the parties to extend the ceasefire to include the West Bank, as suggested by the Secretary-General. Secondly, Prime Minister Olmert's speech on 27 November was a welcome Israeli renewed effort towards a negotiated two-State solution. It also indicated Israel's willingness, among other things, to release prisoners, including ministers and parliamentarians, when the captured Israeli soldier is freed.

The challenge is to convert this current opportunity into sustainable change for the better. Both parties must take urgent steps to boost confidence and solve problems that could undermine peace efforts.

First, Israel must ease humanitarian conditions for civilians in Gaza and the West Bank. One such step is to release the Palestinian tax and customs revenues it is withholding. Secondly, the Agreement on Movement and Access must be implemented. Thirdly, it is essential that Israel halt new settlements and outposts, which are in contradiction to Security Council resolutions and the Road Map. Finally, Demark continues to recognize Israel's right to defend itself. Israel must ensure that measures to protect Israeli civilians are in accordance with international law. Disproportionate use of force could hamper the achievement of a lasting solution to the conflict.

Likewise, the Palestinians must build confidence and become a partner with whom it is possible to build lasting peace. First, the captured Israeli soldier must be released immediately. Secondly, Denmark supports President Abbas's efforts to create a national unity Government that reflects Quartet principles. Thirdly, it is essential that all Palestinian factions do their utmost to keep and consolidate the ceasefire and avoid infighting. It is not a solution, but it provides a much-wanted opportunity. With due respect for the desire of the people, I sincerely hope that all parties are ready to make the best of it

At a time when the outlook seemed as grim as ever, the parties succeeded in creating yet another opportunity. All well-intentioned parties must join forces to see if, this time, the peace process can be revived. The parties, the neighbours and the international community, through the Quartet, all must play a part if this moment is to be seized. We agree with the Secretary-General that the Quartet needs to enhance its activities, to play a more active role.

Progress is critical, mainly for the principal parties involved, but equally for the greater region. Over the past summer, we were reminded that conflicts in the greater Middle East region are linked. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the main source of instability in the region, and, as stated by the Secretary-General, without progress on this track, we are not likely to achieve lasting stability in the Middle East.

Nana Effah-Apenteng (Ghana): Mr. President, at the outset, may I commend your delegation for organizing this debate, which should enable us to examine the possibilities of advancing the cause of peace in the Middle East.

We also wish to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his excellent and comprehensive report on the Middle East, which unquestionably constitutes the most volatile region in the world and, by implication, the major threat to international peace and security.

The situations in Iraq and Lebanon, coupled with the Iranian nuclear programme, are sources of major concern to the international community. We also share the Secretary-General's observation that the failure to achieve a just and comprehensive solution to the long-festering Arab-Israel conflict remains the major underlying source of frustration and instability in the region.

On Lebanon, the progress made in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) makes us cautiously optimistic that the cessation of hostilities, which has so far been maintained without serious incident, will continue to hold. We are encouraged that the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon, in coordination with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, has proceeded satisfactorily and that, in parallel, the Lebanese army has been deployed in the area south of the Litani River and along the Blue Line, leading to the stabilization of the security and military situation in the area.

While we acknowledge those positive developments, we are also mindful of the need for Israel and Lebanon to commit themselves further to the implementation of a permanent ceasefire based on the full acceptance of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords and of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006).

After the lengthy period of violence between Palestine and Israel, the mutual ceasefire agreed on between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert has brought relief to those genuinely interested in peace in the Middle East. It is our expectation that the two sides will refrain from violence, endeavour to maintain the ceasefire, and ensure a sustained period of calm that the people of Palestine and Israel seek and deserve.

As part of the much-needed confidence-building steps, we urge Israel to consider reversing the financial ban on the Palestinian Authority and to release the accrued taxes and duties due to the latter. That act would certainly assist the Administration in meeting its financial obligations and bring succour to the Palestinian people, who have suffered greatly from the consequences of the withholding of funds.

The Secretary-General's recommendation for the Quartet and the Security Council to explore the feasibility of consolidating the ceasefire within an international framework deserves serious consideration. He has called for a stronger international role in order to halt the violence and create political space for negotiations.

The elements mentioned in his report, which include consolidating the ceasefire by working with the parties to define its parameters and rules and extending it to the West Bank, the monitoring of the ceasefire and the promotion of unconditional and open-ended talks between the Israeli Prime Minister and the President of the Palestinian Authority, are options worth pursuing.

We remain concerned that the tireless efforts of the Palestinians to form a Government of national unity have failed to bear fruit. In the larger interest of their people, we again urge the Palestinian Authority and Hamas to cooperate to achieve that goal.

The complete satisfaction of the respective dreams or presumed rights of the Israelis and Palestinians may not be possible, which calls for realism and flexibility on both sides. We therefore urge the Quartet members, which are the sponsors of the road map, to act in concert to revitalize the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In that regard, they may want to bear in mind the Secretary-General's recommendation that they find a way to institutionalize their consultations with the relevant regional partners and engage the parties directly in their deliberations. It should also be possible for the Quartet to look again at the road map with a view to restating its basic goals, principles and end destination.

We are attracted by the proposition that a regional approach is needed to resolve the various crises and conflicts in the Middle East today, not least because progress in each area is to a large extent dependent on progress in others, as eloquently stated in the Secretary-General's report. In that regard, we should also learn lessons from past and recent developments at

the international level. It has become evident that power without legitimacy breeds only disaffection, chaos and resistance, and that military supremacy alone cannot offer the desired security.

A sober and objective analysis of the Secretary-General's report can only lead to the conclusion that any attempt to continue with half-baked or temporary solutions would not be feasible. We are convinced that only a peace agreement whose parameters are well known and enjoy widespread international support can bring peace and security between Israel and the Arab and Muslim world, and make a regional system of security possible.

The Security Council bears an onerous responsibility in the search for comprehensive peace in the Middle East and must continue to work assiduously, in concert with others, towards the settlement of the Palestinian problem, which is at the core of the Middle East question, on the basis of its own resolutions, the Arab peace initiative and a revitalized road map. It therefore behooves the international community to encourage the parties to compromise and learn to live side by side, as envisaged in the two-State solution.

Finally, Sir, we thank your delegation for preparing the draft presidential statement, which we fully support.

Mr. Vassilakis (Greece): I would like to thank you, Sir, for organizing today's thematic debate of the Security Council on sustainable peace in the Middle East, under the leadership of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar.

I would also like to thank and commend the Secretary-General for submitting to the Security Council his insightful report on the Middle East and for providing the Security Council with his highly pertinent and significant observations on that matter. In trying to evaluate and to assess what has transpired in the Middle East during the two years that Greece has served as a non-permanent member of the Security Council, and to give our appraisal of where things stand and where they may go from here, we find that the report of the Secretary=General more than adequately covers most of the observations we would have made and coincides to a very large extent with our evaluation of the situation.

In that regard, we share the Secretary-General's assessment of the reasons behind the lack of significant progress in the implementation of the road map. Both sides have indeed failed to live up to their obligations under the first phase of the road map, and we also note with interest the Secretary-General's observations regarding the role of the Quartet in the whole process.

There is much that is contained in the report that the Security Council should reflect upon. For our part, we would like to emphasize that the Arab-Israeli conflict, of which the Palestinian issue is at the core, and that all attempts to find a solution to it should not overlook the wider regional picture and the dynamics involved in that context.

When viewed from a wider regional perspective, a number of issues emerge and come to the surface that go a long way towards explaining the behaviour of all respective parties. From that perspective, what becomes evident is that the countries of the region all have a key role to play and all share in the responsibility for creating the necessary climate conducive to promoting progress in the peace process.

The behaviour and rhetoric coming out of one country of the region tends to have a direct impact on the behaviour and rhetoric of another, and developments in one country have a bearing on developments in another. Given the situation's inherently regional dimension, the United Nations is the most suitably placed forum wherein a solution ought to be sought and supported by all. The United Nations does indeed have a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner on the basis of international legitimacy, and that responsibility applies as equally vis-à-vis the Palestinians and the Arab populations as it does to the Israeli people and to the State of Israel.

Greece wishes to reaffirm its attachment and commitment to the realization of the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and within secure and internationally recognized borders. The proposals contained in the Secretary-General's report constitute a sober and informed insight as to how progress in that direction may be advanced. The parties to the conflict, the countries of the region, as well as the Security Council should explore all possibilities open to them.

It is our profound hope that we will not have to receive a similar report in 10 years' time, and it is our sincere conviction that the peoples of the region and the international community as a whole can ill afford to allow more time to elapse without making significant and substantial progress towards peace.

Mr. Oshima (Japan): I would like to thank you, Sir, and the mission of Qatar for the initiative of holding this important meeting on the Middle East situation. The region is going through another difficult and dangerous crisis period and requires the Council's close attention, given its serious, broad ramifications.

We thank the Secretary-General for his statement and appreciate his comprehensive report. His report includes observations and recommendations that reflect the profound insight that he has acquired in dealing with Middle East issues over his past 10 years in office, and as such they merit our serious consideration.

The September ministerial meeting on the Middle East resulted in shared views among Council members and the relevant parties on the following issues.

First, the Palestinian issue is the key; without its solution there can be no comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Secondly, violence cannot solve the problems; direct negotiations and dialogue, based on moderation, mutual tolerance and understanding, are the only way to achieve progress towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

Thirdly, the international community should accelerate its efforts to move the peace process forward.

However, it is regrettable that, three months after the last ministerial meeting, the situation concerning Palestine has seen further deterioration, despite the strenuous efforts exerted by the relevant parties, including countries of the region. Among other matters, we are deeply concerned about the continuing violence, which is creating a high number of casualties on both sides, Palestine and Israel.

It is true that the international community cannot serve as a substitute for the parties to the conflict themselves, but that by no means diminishes the importance of the international community making efforts to create a conducive environment for the parties to solve the conflict.

The crisis in Lebanon last summer reminded us once again that nothing is more essential than concerted and dedicated efforts and a strong will for peace among the parties themselves, in order to overcome the difficulties that divide Palestinians and Israelis. We therefore welcome the recent agreement by Israel and the Palestinian Authority on a mutual ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. We highly appreciate the leadership shown by President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert to produce that significant achievement.

Japan reiterates its call upon both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides to exercise maximum self-restraint in order to ensure that the fragile ceasefire is adhered to. We also urge both parties to make further efforts to extend such an agreement to the West Bank and to achieve a ceasefire there as well.

We call for the safe return of the abducted Israeli soldier, as well as for the release of the Palestinian ministers and parliament members held in custody in Israel.

Direct talks at the highest level between the parties are the only way to open a window to a solution of the problems. It is also our hope — especially at this critical moment — that a direct summit meeting between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert will occur as soon as possible, with a view to the early resumption of the peace negotiations. We take positive note of the recent remark made by Prime Minister Olmert, as it showed his will to break through the current stalemate.

The political deadlock in Palestine continues to be a matter of deep concern. We wish to emphasize here again the critical importance of demonstrating strong political will, backed by determined efforts on the part of all the parties concerned. We wish to express our fervent hope for the continuation of efforts that will result in the formation of a new Palestinian Authority government, as well as our firm expectation that, once established, the new government will make clear that it will pursue peaceful coexistence and mutual prosperity with Israel. When that happens, the international community should respond positively with all the support such a welcome development deserves.

We are particularly concerned about the humanitarian plight of the Palestinian people, which continues to deteriorate. In that regard, we must impress upon Israel the need to take immediate action on the transfer of tax and customs revenues to the Palestinian Authority and to restore freedom of movement for the Palestinian people.

Japan has been one of the major donors to Palestinians for many years, and we wish to reaffirm our determination to continue to extend assistance to the Palestinian people. We have been steadily implementing the assistance we have pledged, including the emergency humanitarian assistance of $25 million announced in July this year. We strongly urge the international community to continue to provide the humanitarian assistance urgently needed to cope with the crisis facing Palestinians.

Japan is also working to implement the concept of a corridor of peace and prosperity, which is a development plan for the Jordan Valley through regional cooperation involving Israel, Palestine and Jordan, with a view to realizing coexistence and mutual prosperity in the mid- and long-term perspectives. Japan sent a feasibility study mission to the region in November, and further action will follow.

With respect to the situation in Lebanon, the recent domestic political upheavals notwithstanding, we welcome the fact that the cessation of hostilities has been maintained and that the overall situation has further improved and stabilized following the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), in particular through the extension of State authority in the south. We reaffirm our commitment to the resolution's implementation. There remain, however, many challenges to be addressed, foremost among them Lebanon and Israel, for full implementation of the resolution and lasting stabilization of the situation in Lebanon.

Japan strongly supports the efforts exerted to that end by the Lebanese Government under the leadership of Prime Minister Siniora. Japan hopes that the parties and factions concerned in Lebanon will engage proactively — through dialogue and without resorting to violence — in the efforts aimed at stability and reconstruction in the country and the region. No actions that may contribute to destabilizing the situation in Lebanon can be tolerated. We condemn the assassination of Pierre Gemayel, Minister for Industry, on 21 November.

In order to achieve a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution, it is essential for the international community to address the issues of disarming and disbanding all remaining militias and of the delineation of the border. A comprehensive peace that includes both the Lebanese and the Syrian tracks is the only way to permanent peace there. In that connection, Japan expects Syria to play a proactive role towards the realization of peace and stability in the region.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate the need for the international community to do its utmost to revitalize the Middle East peace process. For its part, Japan, under the new leadership of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, reaffirms its readiness and determination to continue its proactive, constructive engagement in the process and to extend the maximum assistance possible to contribute to that end.

Mr. Wang Guangya (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to welcome you to the Council, Mr. Minister, to preside over today's meeting. I also welcome the presence of Secretary-General Annan and thank him for the report (S/2006/956) he submitted to us yesterday.

As a cradle of human civilization, the Middle East is the birthplace of the Mesopotamian civilization and the religions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Unfortunately, for the past half-century or so, that land has been plagued by protracted wars and frequent flare-ups, and its peoples have been subjected to all kinds of suffering brought about by occupation, wars, sanctions and so on. The incessant turbulence in the Middle East, with no solution in sight, does not bode well for the prospect of peace and development in the region. Moreover, it negatively affects the peace and stability of the whole world. The current situation is particularly worrisome given the continued conflict between Palestine and Israel, the impasse in the implementation of the Road Map and the lack of progress in both the Lebanese-Israeli and the Syrian-Israeli talks. Where the Middle East is heading is a question of serious concern to the international community.

Against that backdrop, Mr. President, your initiative to hold this ministerial meeting of the Security Council on the question of the Middle East is highly necessary and timely. We support it fully.

For decades, the question of the Middle East mainly found expression in conflicts between Israel and Arab countries. At present, however, various

hotspot issues share the stage, including the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Lebanese-Israeli conflict, the instability in Iraq and other tensions in region. Moreover, they are intertwined and affect each other. The Middle East is undergoing the most profound changes in recent years, which has resulted in an even more complicated overall situation that has a major bearing on international peace and security and on global economic development. No country can respond to it single-handedly, and no country can simply mind its own business. The international community must take a strategic perspective and join hands in a concerted effort to seek a comprehensive settlement.

China appreciates the efforts of the Quartet in promoting peace and facilitating talks and encourages it to play a more proactive role. Yesterday, Secretary-General Annan submitted to the Security Council his final report on the Middle East, which contains a number of bold and detailed proposals for the comprehensive settlement of the Middle East question. They deserve serious consideration by the Council.

While a settlement of the Middle East question cannot be achieved without the support of the international community, the key still lies in the hands of the parties concerned. Decades of confrontation and conflict have left a deep legacy of grievances between Israel and Arab countries. Thus, it is necessary to foster an atmosphere of mutual trust. It is our sincere hope that the parties concerned will break out of the futile mode of offering violence for violence and toughness for toughness, take the initiative to show goodwill and do more to ease tensions.

In that connection, we support efforts by Palestine to form a government of national unity, welcome the willingness expressed by Israel to engage in peace talks and hope that the two parties will work together for an early return to the path of negotiations.

The Security Council bears the solemn responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. The question of the Middle East is the oldest item on the Council's agenda and the Council's biggest headache. The failure to find a solution to the Middle East question, over such a long time, has had a negative impact on the role and authority of the Security Council.

For many years, the Security Council has been in passive firefighting mode. After the outbreak of the Lebanese-Israeli conflict, it took 34 days of arduous consultations for the Security Council to adopt a resolution requesting the two sides to cease hostilities. When United Nations peacekeepers were attacked and lost their lives, the Security Council only expressed its regret in a mild manner, in a presidential statement. Such abnormality has aroused the serious dissatisfaction of many Member States, especially Arab States. That is something the Council must reflect upon. It should transform itself as soon as possible from firefighter to problem solver, come up with innovative ideas, work in the spirit of seeking overall common ground and setting aside minor differences and take an active and pragmatic approach in order to assist in efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and push for the resumption of the Middle East peace process.

After decades of turmoil, the people of the Middle East are tired of endless conflict and instability. In the twenty-first century, when the whole world is advancing rapidly, their desire to achieve peace and join the mainstream of development has become stronger and more urgent. China is willing to work together with the rest of the international community to promote the Middle East peace process and to help the people of the region achieve the goal of peace and development at an early date. If we make concerted efforts, peace in the Middle East will no longer be an elusive dream.

Mr. Voto-Bernales (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I welcome you, Sir, as you preside over this debate in your capacity as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar. I thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his praiseworthy efforts in offering the Council a broad and detailed overview of the problems in the Middle East. That overview is outlined in the report (S/2006/956) before the Council today, which should lead us to promote a resumption of the peace process in that region.

In that regard, and as has been reflected in the discussions held regularly by the Council, the lack of a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict continues to be a source of frustration and instability in the region. In that regard, a comprehensive approach is needed to resolve the various crises and conflicts in the region. First of all, the parties directly involved must take constructive steps to ease tensions and generate an appropriate climate for the restoration of peace. Efforts of support by the international community will be

viable only if the regional players display the political will to move the process forward.

The main objective should be to put an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories by establishing two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002) and the Road Map defined by the Quartet and endorsed by the Council in resolution 1515 (2003).

The weakening of political institutions and the lack of cohesion in the Palestinian Government since the beginning of 2006 seriously jeopardize the peace process. Extremist groups have taken advantage of the situation to launch terrorist attacks against civilian populations in Israel. Understandably and justifiably, the Israeli authorities have been obliged to respond to those acts of aggression. However, and to avoid a repetition of events like those we saw again in November, that right must be exercised responsibly, avoiding causalities among the civilian population and avoiding the destruction of civilian infrastructure.

The recent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip agreed to between Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and Palestinian President Abbas has led to new hope that the path of negotiations will replace that of violence. We hope that this first step will be further consolidated and extended to the West Bank, in order to promote the action and leadership of those, in Israel and in Palestine, who advocate a negotiated solution.

For its part, Lebanon, following the tragic armed confrontation that occurred this year and that led to enormous loss of human life and property, also holds a new opportunity for resolving a number of pending problems among the Lebanese themselves.

Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) renews the possibility of addressing the root causes which have kept that country from achieving stability and sovereignty over its territory. That is also an opportunity for promoting peaceful coexistence and working towards a resolution to the conflict with Israel.

In addition, the question of the occupation of the Syrian Golan is still pending. The doors to negotiation between those parties must also be opened if a solution is to be achieved. The experience of this year's war has only underscored the close interrelationship among the various hotbeds of conflict. We need a comprehensive approach that will enable us to make parallel progress towards resolving the various conflicts.

We reiterate our conviction that the conflicts in the Middle East can be resolved only through political negotiation and on the basis of agreements reached by the parties and recognized by the international community. There are no lasting unilateral solutions. In that regard, and as the Secretary-General notes in paragraph 44 of his report, "The Quartet retains its relevance because of its combination of legitimacy, political strength and economic influence".

We appreciate the Secretary-General's appeal to the Quartet to be open to new ideas and initiatives. Similarly, the Road Map is the point of reference to be used for any initiative aimed at resuming the peace process between Israel and Palestine. Therefore, Peru echoes the appeal of the Secretary-General for the international community to engage with the parties concerned in order to reach a final settlement of the Middle East problem.

The President (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Following consultations among the members of the Security Council, I have been authorized to make the following statement on behalf of the Council:

> "The Security Council expresses its deep concern over the situation in the Middle East, with its serious ramifications for peace and security, and underlines the need to intensify efforts to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.
>
> "The Security Council stresses that there can be no military solution to the problems of the region and that negotiation is the only viable way to bring peace and prosperity to peoples throughout the Middle East.
>
> "The Security Council stresses that the parties must respect their obligations under previous agreements, including by putting an end to violence and all aspects of terrorism.
>
> "The Security Council expresses grave concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation and calls for the provision of emergency assistance to the Palestinian people through the temporary international mechanism, international organizations and other official channels.

"The Security Council welcomes the agreement between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to establish a mutual ceasefire in Gaza.

"The Security Council welcomes the steps taken by both sides to maintain the ceasefire and expresses its hope that it will lead to a sustained period of calm. It calls on both sides, therefore, to avoid any actions which could jeopardize further progress. It reiterates its call for an end to all aspects of terrorism and violence as set out in previous statements and resolutions.

"The Security Council is mindful of the need to encourage steps to increase confidence in the peace process.

"The Security Council reiterates its call for the Palestinian Authority Government to accept the three Quartet principles.

"The Security Council reaffirms its profound attachment to the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, as envisaged in the Road Map.

"The Security Council underlines that action by the international community cannot be a substitute for determined measures by the parties themselves.

"The Security Council encourages the parties to engage in direct negotiations.

"The Security Council reaffirms the vital role of the Quartet and looks forward to its continued active engagement.

"The Security Council reiterates the importance of, and the need to achieve, a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all its relevant resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003), the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace."

This statement will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2006/51.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 1.40 p.m.